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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Fifty-second session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 554th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 2 October 2001, at 10 a.m.

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| Chairman: | Mr. MOLANDER | (Sweden) |
| later: | Mr. YIMER (Vice-Chairman) | (Ethiopia) |

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. FULLER (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), noting the new challenges facing UNHCR, reaffirmed his country's support for the response by the international community to, in particular, the Afghan crisis, for which the United Kingdom had allocated US$ 54 million in additional funding.

2. The United Kingdom welcomed the structural reforms initiated by the High Commissioner, with a view to developing a sharper focus for UNHCR and improving its accountability, transparency and financial management. Another commendable initiative had been the Global Consultations, which would lead to a better understanding of the difficulties of individual States and help revitalize the refugee protection regime. The United Kingdom looked forward to the agenda for protection, as one of the outcomes of the Consultations, and also welcomed the development of stronger partnerships with other agencies, donors, implementing partners and refugees themselves, as essential means of enhancing cooperation and performance and as vehicles for capacity-building.

3. Reaffirming the United Kingdom's commitment to supporting UNHCR, he reminded the meeting that support for UNHCR was not only financial, as in the case of host countries which bore the enormous burden of accommodating large refugee populations, and stressed the need to explore ways in which the international community could better share that burden.

4. Mr. AL AGHBASH (Sudan) conveyed his country's deep regret and condolences to the families of the victims of the terrorist attacks against the United States of America. Reviewing the international legal basis for the protection of refugees, he stressed the need to enhance and invigorate the effect of those legal instruments by linking legal protection with assistance, an essential step in securing the basic human rights of refugees, and to redefine the notion of refugee, in the light of international developments in the post-cold-war era, to exclude cases of economic migration.

5. Recalling his country's experience with the voluntary repatriation of refugees, he appealed for continued assistance from UNHCR and the international community in dealing with the outstanding caseload. Following the application of the cessation clause, Sudan faced an alarming situation, as all assistance programmes to the refugee-affected areas had been suspended during the early 1990s for political reasons, without regard for the humanitarian nature of the problem.

6. In particular, he stressed the need to safeguard the integrity of refugee families and the welfare of refugee children, especially girls. He reiterated Sudan's insistence on the right of refugees to return home, in accordance with article 5 of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa and deplored the fact that, for political reasons, Sudanese refugees were being impeded in the exercise of that right. He reaffirmed his country's commitment to all regional and international instruments on refugees and, in particular, to article 5 of the 1969 OAU Convention, and its support for the current preparations to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the 1951 Convention.

7. Mr. KYRÖLÄINEN (Finland) welcomed the High Commissioner's plea for a "culture of respect", particularly in the context of the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, and stressed that the international fight against terrorism should not turn into a war against Afghans or on Islam. While UNHCR most often had to respond to emergencies, he agreed with the High Commissioner's view that closer attention should be given to preventive action and to building capacity in refugee-hosting countries, which required new linkages between humanitarian and development aid. Accordingly, he welcomed efforts to forge closer relationships between UNHCR and development agencies and bilateral donors. Finland welcomed the initiatives by the High Commissioner to revitalize the Organization, in particular, the Actions 1, 2 and 3 exercise, but urged UNHCR not to allow the reform process to undermine staff motivation and well-being and to ensure that members of the Executive Committee and other UNHCR partners were involved in shaping the Office's future development.

8. In response to the High Commissioner's call for early funding commitments for 2002, he said that Finland's humanitarian aid budget for that year would probably be 15 per cent higher than in 2001, an increase which would be reflected in its contributions to UNHCR.

9. He commended the Office on its current Global Consultations process, which would work together with the parallel Tampere process of the European Union in strengthening the international protection regime. Finland also looked forward to the draft agenda for protection and the ministerial declaration to be adopted at the first ever meeting of States parties to the 1951 Convention, to be held in December 2001, and hoped that those and other initiatives, including the UNHCR 2004 project, would bring maximum benefits to refugees and other groups of concern to UNHCR during the years to come.

10. Mr. MAURER (Switzerland) said that the forthcoming ministerial meeting to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the 1951 Convention, to be held in December 2001 in Geneva, would provide an opportunity to explore ways of strengthening the application of the Convention and, in that context, he welcomed the draft text of the declaration to be adopted at that meeting. The meeting would form part of the Global Consultations process, which should be intensified with a view to achieving tangible results in strengthening the international refugee protection system.

11. Switzerland supported efforts by the High Commissioner to reform and strengthen UNHCR and to find durable solutions to the problems of refugees. He hoped that the transparency which had characterized that work, in particular Actions 1 and 2, would also obtain in the UNHCR 2004 process. Switzerland's support for UNHCR at the political, operational and financial levels was reflected in its planned contribution of 23.5 million Swiss francs, subject to parliamentary approval.

12. Turning to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the region, he stressed the need, on the one hand, to respect international humanitarian law and, on the other, to ensure that impartial humanitarian staff were not impeded in their functions, threatened or imprisoned. It was also important that the neighbouring countries should be supported in their efforts to host the Afghan refugees and that Afghanistan's international borders should not be closed.

13. Mr. NEGROTTO CAMBIASO (Italy) said that Italy fully supported the High Commissioner's approach to the restructuring of the Office but stressed that the distinction between essential and non-essential activities should not replicate the past distinction between general and special programmes and that the reduction of activities for budgetary reasons should not prejudice the protection of refugee women and children.

14. Italy also supported the Global Consultations process and welcomed the recent approval of the draft ministerial declaration for the meeting of States parties to the Convention in December 2001. Its support for the Actions 1, 2 and 3 process was manifested in an increase in its funding to the Office, from 7.6 million euros in 1999 to 12.2 million euros in 2001, with an additional contribution of 7.6 million euros for Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Given the importance of early warning in meeting the growing needs of refugees, the High Commissioner's UNHCR 2004 initiative merited particular attention.

15. Mr. MOHAMED (Nigeria) commended the High Commissioner on his reform initiative, in particular, the Actions 1, 2 and 3 to redefine the Office's core activities, but cautioned that the resulting cut-backs, such as those already effected under Action 2, might have long-term adverse consequences on protection efforts and, therefore, on the core activities. Care should also be taken in reducing non-core activities that had long-term benefits for refugees and helped cushion the burden borne by host countries. While welcoming the reform measures, in particular the granting of greater autonomy to regional directors, Nigeria stressed that the reform effort should be pursued in a fully transparent manner, taking due account of realities in the field.

16. Nigeria was pleased that host countries were now recognized as donors and appealed for practical mechanisms to help share the burden borne by such countries. Noting the problems caused to host countries by the cessation of material assistance for non-self-reliant refugees, he urged UNHCR to review refugee situations very carefully before deciding to apply cessation clauses. Nigeria supported proposals by the High Commissioner to accelerate the funding process, in particular, for contributions to be made early in the year, for the High Commissioner to have flexibility in the use of funds and for additional funds to be sourced through partnerships with other agencies, States and non-governmental organizations.

17. Finally, Nigeria supported the High Commissioner's commitment to tackling the disturbing problem of staff security and joined other delegations in condemning the terrorist attacks against the United States, calling for a united effort to avert the pending humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan.

18. Ms. APORU (Uganda) said that the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees was hardly cause for celebration given the unprecedented number of refugee situations, with Afghanistan only the latest. The international community must make a concerted effort to address that challenge. She took note of the Actions 1, 2 and 3 review process initiated by the High Commissioner to redefine the core mandate of UNHCR and ensure adequate funding, a matter of particular concern that had adversely affected programmes in Africa.

19. Uganda had a liberal asylum policy, and currently hosted around 180,000 refugees, mostly from the Sudan. Refugees were placed in settlements, rather than camps, and were given

land with the aim of making them self-sufficient. In collaboration with UNHCR her Government had adopted a self-reliance strategy with the integration of refugee services into government social policy, so that refugees had access to the same services and resources as Ugandan nationals. She noted with concern that the categorization of local integration as a core function under Action 1 involved agreement by governments to assimilation, in which case UNHCR financial support would be permitted only for 18 months. Assimilation meant that refugees acquired citizenship and had the option of remaining in the country of asylum. That issue was, however, for countries of asylum to deal with.

20. Her Government's integration and self-reliance strategy had been premised on giving refugees access to arable land. Local populations had been persuaded to make land available on the understanding that services beneficial to both refugees and nationals would be provided, and in the past UNHCR had helped in the development of infrastructure outside refugee settlements. It seemed that under Action 1 such projects would no longer be funded, which would undermine the goodwill built up among local communities. It was not possible to extend effective protection to refugees if they were better off than the local population. Unless UNHCR showed flexibility, her Government might rethink its policy and opt for camps rather than settlements.

21. It was also proposed under Actions 1 and 2 that donor countries should make money available directly to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in refugee work. That was likely to be disadvantageous to local NGOs, since donor countries tended to fund their own organizations. In addition, the proposal that other services should be incorporated in donor programmes would mean that refugees would be factored into country programmes, so that nationals and refugees would vie for the same funds, in which case there was no guarantee that refugees would remain on the agenda of development partners.

22. Regarding the proposal that each donor country should contribute at least US$ 1 or € 1 per inhabitant, she noted that her Government's expenditure on refugees represented a much larger contribution. Her Government would fully support the UNHCR 2004 process and the Global Consultations on International Protection. The declaration to be adopted at the December 2001 Ministerial Meeting should be a consensus document.

23. Mr. JOHANSEN (Norway) said that his Government would continue to be a main contributor to UNHCR, reflecting its confidence in the organization and support of its mission. Its contribution to UNHCR for 2001 would be of the order of US$ 35 million. His delegation regretted that the budget of UNHCR was an inadequate demonstration of international solidarity with the millions of refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as with the developing countries that bore a heavy burden by receiving many refugees from neighbouring countries. More determined action was called for. UNHCR should continue to focus on protection and durable solutions, strive for acceptable budgetary solutions, and promote coordination of its efforts with those of other humanitarian agencies and organizations. Donors must improve UNHCR's finances, which were too dependent on contributions from too few donors. An increase in funding from the United Nations regular budget was also justified.

24. The increasing complexity of international migratory flows presented a challenge to the international protection regime. The Global Consultations process would allow proposals for improvements to be made. UNHCR must incorporate in all its activities protection for its own

staff and the more vulnerable refugees: children, the elderly and women. It was important for UNHCR to engage in inter-agency cooperation and collaborative arrangements with NGOs in devising durable solutions. The distinction between core and non-core activities made sense only as a guideline for an institutional division of labour. The root causes of displacement must be addressed: the prospect of economic and social progress would act as a pull factor in attracting displaced persons back to their homes.

25. Mr. DEMBRI (Algeria) said that the question of refugees had become ever more complex and was now a global concern. Solidarity and responsibility were required to confront international terrorism, as represented by the tragic events of 11 September. Care must be taken to avoid racism, xenophobia and intolerance, which could only lead to confrontation and to more refugee flows. The international community must focus on the negative aspects of globalization so that all of humanity enjoyed shared prosperity, hopes and happiness.

26. Humanitarian work, essential to millions of refugees throughout the world, had been affected by a serious, ongoing financial crisis and by the heavy burden placed on host countries, particularly developing countries. Measures to promote international protection, durable solutions, development and respect for refugees must be taken in the context of a strategic partnership between donor and host countries. Most refugees were in countries in the southern hemisphere and those countries made a fundamental contribution to the protection of refugees. African States had played an important role in that regard despite their meagre resources, and the efforts of the Organization of African Unity and individual African countries must be recognized. New thinking, more resources and more effective logistics would all improve the situation of refugees.

27. The Actions 1, 2 and 3 programme must take into account the number of refugees in a given region and country, the length of the crisis and the resultant degree of instability in determining priorities for intervention, subject to objective criteria. The UNHCR 2004 and Global Consultations process represented a significant advance in the work of the organization. Revitalization of the system of international protection must include eradication of the causes of refugee flows, respect for the sovereignty of States, recognition of the contribution of host countries, burden sharing, strengthening of national capacities, adoption of regional approaches, and a change in the perception of refugees. In that regard he called for support for the plan of action for refugees in Africa.

28. Mr. PETIT (France) expressed condolences to the people of the United States of America. The terrorist attacks were a threat to all, and all countries, all cultures and all religions must take up the struggle against the criminal groups and individuals responsible for such acts.

29. The refocusing of UNHCR on its core mandate and the review of priorities were very positive. The shortage of funding made it essential for the organization to concentrate on its role of protecting refugees, and his delegation supported the criteria for intervention established by the High Commissioner. The division of labour among the various humanitarian actors must be transparent and accord with their respective mandates. It was clear that refugee movements represented a particular burden for developing countries, a factor that should be reflected in development aid. In that connection his Government was engaged in a dialogue with UNHCR regarding support for development projects that would promote the reintegration of refugees in

their home countries. The member States of the European Union sought a closer partnership with UNHCR by placing the Organization's funding on a more stable basis and involving it in the formulation of a common European Union policy on asylum.

30. His delegation welcomed the efforts by UNHCR to improve its response capacity. He commended the Organization on its intervention in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and on its preparations for the Afghan situation in an effort to avoid a further humanitarian crisis. Conflict prevention and the search for regional solutions must precede UNHCR intervention. Crises such as that in Guinea required dialogue between countries in the region. Lastly, he noted that his Government's contribution to UNHCR had increased by some 15 per cent in 2001.

31. Ms. de HOZ (Argentina) expressed solidarity with the people and Government of the United States in connection with the tragic events of 11 September.

32. Her delegation agreed with the High Commissioner that UNHCR must seek not only to protect refugees but also to find solutions, without which there could be no protection. Durable solutions to humanitarian crises must be sought from the very outset. It was often the case that massive refugee flows continued for long periods because the fundamental cause remained. Host countries were not always able to provide refugees with suitable living conditions or bring about their integration without support from the international community.

33. She reaffirmed her Government's commitment to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol and welcomed the Ministerial Meeting of States parties to be held in December 2001. She shared the High Commissioner's concern at hostility towards and mistrust of refugees and at their vulnerability. Xenophobia must be countered. Her country had a long tradition of welcoming refugees. The Government was developing special programmes in order to avert any occurrence of racial discrimination and xenophobia vis-à-vis migrants and refugees. She welcomed UNHCR's cooperation with the office responsible for determining eligibility for refugee status; that would undoubtedly benefit bona fide applicants. International developments necessitated a renewed focus on humanitarian assistance and international cooperation. In that regard she commended UNHCR on its rapid response to humanitarian crises, such as that in Afghanistan.

34. Mr. SUNGAR (Turkey) expressed his delegation's sorrow and sympathy for the victims of the terrorist attacks of 11 September. Those events had triggered new population movements and displacement and the world's attention had once again been drawn to the plight of refugees, particularly those in South-West Asia. He hoped that the international community would respond in a spirit of shared responsibility and he commended the recent efforts of UNHCR, inter alia, to mobilize the international community.

35. The aim of the Global Consultations process was to reaffirm the centrality of the 1951 Convention, while developing approaches, tools and standards to address areas that were not adequately covered by the current protection regime. Situated as it was in the centre of several population movements from east to west, Turkey was perhaps in the best position to understand the nature of such movements. From the start of the Global Consultations process, it had tried to

draw attention to the fact that conditions had changed since the drafting of the 1951 Convention. It was important to eliminate confusion regarding the implementation of asylum procedures, which threatened the integrity of the entire asylum system.

36. Turkey had been concerned to address the issue of exclusion and the problem of ensuring that refugee status was granted only to those who deserved it. It was well known that certain people tried to avoid prosecution by taking advantage of some of the vaguer provisions of asylum regulations. His delegation considered that recent developments had borne those concerns out and it was incumbent on the international community to demonstrate more sensitivity to the abuses of international protection by criminals and terrorists, without undermining the rights of refugees.

37. Ms. KUNADI (India) said the High Commissioner had been right to describe durable solutions as the heart of UNHCR's action, along with international protection. As the Secretariat had repeatedly noted, the quality of asylum had deteriorated in recent years, yet many of the States with the most limited resources had continued to host large refugee populations. In the meantime, the restrictive practices against refugees imposed by countries with both a duty and the economic means to provide protection had a detrimental impact on public opinion regarding refugee protection in the rest of the world. Neither that duty nor the real costs were fairly apportioned across the world. Burden-sharing and solidarity went beyond the mere provision of resources. An international system that failed to address such concerns was not sustainable.

38. A rigid, legalistic approach to international protection was not desirable. What was important was practice. India, for example, had not signed the 1951 Convention because the Convention failed to address a number of key issues currently being discussed in the third track of the Global Consultations; yet it hosted large numbers of refugees and funded its refugee programmes entirely from its own resources. India had long called for concerted efforts to combat terrorism. The events of 11 September had brought that need into sharp focus, yet the fight was not against a particular people or religion. It should not dilute the institution of asylum, but it was important to guard against abuse by States that, unwittingly or otherwise, sheltered terrorists.

39. The role of poverty in generating refugee crises had not been sufficiently recognized. Poverty and degradation brought out the worst in human beings, yet the resulting conflicts took forms that made it difficult to see the connection. She welcomed the High Commissioner's emphasis on bridging the gap between emergency relief and long-term development: it was essential to enhance developing countries' capacity to take back their citizens. However, the most effective approach was to prevent humanitarian crises through investment in sustainable development in those countries. Promotion of lawful and mutually beneficial migration to answer manpower needs around the world could also contribute greatly to reducing the smuggling and illegal migration associated with complex flows.

40. Her delegation considered that voluntary repatriation remained the best solution. Resettlement was also a possibility, but the implications of local integration, particularly in situations of mass exodus into a developing country, needed careful consideration. Restrictive and discriminatory practices such as lengthy detention needed to be addressed effectively. Respect for refugees meant respect for their human rights and their productive potential, and

acceptance of multiculturalism. She welcomed the new security training courses for UNHCR staff. Assistance should be given to States that requested it, to enhance their national capacity to ensure the safety of UNHCR personnel.

41. Lastly, she hoped the first two tracks of the Global Consultations process would enable States parties to strengthen their commitment to the principles of the Convention and the Protocol. India hoped that the third track would focus not so much on narrow legal approaches but on practical solutions to problems such as mass and mixed flows and the large refugee burdens faced by developing countries. What was needed above all was political commitment to the humanitarian values of asylum and protection.

42. Ms. ANDERSSON (Sweden) said the most acute task currently facing UNHCR was the situation in Afghanistan. The catastrophe that was unfolding, despite long years of humanitarian support to the people of Afghanistan and Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries, was proof of the international community's failure to deal with the root causes of conflict and forced displacement. The international community needed to give prompt support, but it must do more than meet bare minimum needs, for long-term Afghan refugees and displaced persons were finding it hard to keep hope alive. Where people remained destitute, or children did not have access to education, that could only lead to further problems.

43. Protection and assistance, on the one hand, and development, on the other, were linked. Sustainable development could not be achieved if refugees' productive capacities were ignored by host countries, returnees' own Governments, donors and aid organizations. Developing countries' ability to cope with refugee influxes could be enhanced if they provided refugees with land or employment to help them sustain themselves. What was most important, however, was to prevent forced migration. If development endeavours and efforts to prevent conflicts failed, the result would be further protracted refugee situations.

44. Sweden hoped that UNHCR's efforts to avoid financial shortfalls in the 2002 budget, by striking a balance between the minimum credible scale of UNHCR and a realistic estimate of what was fundable, would pay off. It was now up to the donors to ensure that that budget was fully funded, so that UNHCR was equipped to take on the tasks the international community requested it to perform, including ensuring the security of its own staff and humanitarian workers. Many of the recent tragic events related to refugee problems underscored the vital importance of adequate funding of UNHCR. Sweden had made a preliminary commitment to an increased contribution of 392 million Swedish kronor for 2002.

45. In the meantime, States parties to the Convention needed to give more than financial support. They should receive and protect those asylum seekers who came to their borders. UNHCR's task would be easier if more countries were prepared to assist with resettlement. In that regard, the International Conference for the Reception and Integration of Resettled Refugees, held in Sweden in April 2001, had helped to show how to facilitate the integration of people, who should be seen as resourceful individuals, and how to create a hospitable environment for them.

46. Sweden attached great importance to the absolute respect of the right to seek asylum. Crucial work was being done in establishing a common European asylum system, based on the full and inclusive application of the Convention, and 2001 had seen a breakthrough in harmonization in the European Union, in the form of agreement on an instrument to provide temporary protection for people in mass flight situations. Sweden also welcomed the recent proposal for a European Union directive on minimum standards for qualification as a refugee or a person otherwise in need of protection, which acknowledged that refugee status could be granted on the basis of persecution, whether by a State or a non-State agent. It also welcomed the proposal that persecution based on gender or sexual orientation should be included in the Convention definition.

47. Mr. NIKIFOROV (Russian Federation) said that finding solutions to refugee problems posed a challenge for the entire international community. Humanitarian efforts should go hand in hand with political initiatives. There should be a smooth transition from emergency aid to rehabilitation of refugees, for example through voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement in third countries. The issue of internal migration also needed to be squarely faced, and underlying problems should not be left to fester. Long-term solutions needed to be realistic and feasible, and should be devised with the 1951 Convention in mind. The most important element in the work of UNHCR was undoubtedly the human dimension, in other words, the fact that the plight of one State could elicit a sympathetic response from others. At the same time, international solidarity must be firmly anchored in international law.

48. His delegation welcomed the interim conclusions of the Global Consultations on the international protection of refugees, emphasizing as they did international partnership and mutual support.

49. Mr. SHA Zukang (China) said China supported UNHCR's measures to improve the organization's management and hoped the improvements to the fund-raising mechanism would help UNHCR out of its financial predicament. In view of those financial difficulties, it was realistic to make a distinction between core and non-core activities. However, his delegation considered that, when setting priorities, the particular difficulties of developing countries hosting refugees should be taken into account.

50. China had always maintained that, in order to resolve the refugee problem, it was necessary first to address its root causes, including racial discrimination, religious friction, territorial disputes, foreign interference and regional conflicts, while strengthening protection. Such root causes were as yet far from being eliminated. It would help to prevent refugee crises and, indeed, to resolve existing refugee problems, if countries would abide by the Charter of the United Nations and relevant norms of international law, including mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs and peaceful coexistence, while endeavouring to promote international peace and development.

51. China would continue to support UNHCR in its endeavours and play its part in the global efforts to resolve the refugee problem. His delegation had actively participated in the Global Consultations, which, despite controversies on many issues, he was confident would lead to a common understanding among all parties on the international protection issue and on enhancing the international protection regime.

52. Mr. YIMER (Ethiopia) said that while his delegation fully supported the High Commissioner's efforts to restructure and review UNHCR's worldwide responsibilities, economy measures should be implemented in phases without compromising vital services to refugees. Assistance to African refugees was already at a bare minimum and further reductions would adversely affect their daily lives. Furthermore, restrictive budgetary measures would inevitably affect the asylum policies of African Governments, which had very limited or absolutely no resources to cope with refugee influxes. In Ethiopia's case, it was imperative that protection should continue to be combined with assistance.

53. UNHCR needed to promote international cooperation in order to ensure equitable burden-sharing. Developing countries made enormous sacrifices to accommodate refugees. Yet international assistance to African refugees had contracted in comparison with assistance to refugees elsewhere. UNHCR should actively engage donors and mobilize international assistance to redress the balance. In addition, prolonged presence of refugees in host countries tended to place a considerable strain on the local environment and infrastructure, and UNHCR should play a role in rebuilding those assets. The Office should also be closely involved in the initial stage of reintegration following repatriation.

54. Mass influxes of refugees frequently overtaxed the local administrative apparatus in host countries. Without in any way compromising the asylum regime, UNHCR had a duty to consider States' administrative and security concerns. In conclusion, he was pleased to announce that Ethiopia had successfully completed the repatriation of various groups of refugees in its territory and had closed down a number of refugee camps.

55. Mr. VEGA (Chile) paid tribute to the work of UNHCR's staff, who daily demonstrated their dedication to the humanitarian cause of refugees around the world, sometimes at the tragic cost of their own life. Every possible effort should be made to improve security for them.

56. By coincidence, 11 September was a sad anniversary in Chile, too, as it was on that same date that violence had become an integral part of State political action, affecting thousands of innocent people, including children, and causing many Chileans to suffer exile and seek asylum. The current situation was a reminder that refugees were innocent victims and that no drop in the standards of protection should be tolerated. Chile would contribute to that effort, on the basis of its own dual experience: until 1973 as a country of asylum for those fleeing political persecution elsewhere in Latin America; and after 1973 as the country of origin of a vast number of refugees, who had received such strong international support.

57. Since its return to democracy, Chile had tried to rejoin the chain of solidarity for those seeking resettlement. The UNHCR-Chile resettlement programme constituted a modest start, but was a clear gesture of international solidarity, and a group of Afghan refugees had recently arrived in the country as part of that programme. Lastly, he was pleased to report that, under the 2000 Rio de Janeiro Declaration, Mercosur, Bolivia and Chile had reached agreement on the gradual harmonization of refugee legislation and procedures, and initial meetings had already taken place.

58. Mr. DOBÓ (Hungary) said that his Government appreciated the assistance which UNHCR had provided in developing the Hungarian asylum system, training officials, and

drafting relevant legislation. Hungarian laws relating to refugees and asylum-seekers were in full conformity with European Union legislation and relevant international standards. In the context of the Global Consultations on international protection, Hungary believed that durable solutions to refugee problems could be secured only by encouraging dialogue and cooperation between countries of origin, transit countries, and countries of asylum. Special attention should be paid to the receiving capacity of individual States. In addition, emphasis should be placed on organized crime, which was increasingly linked to illegal migration and repeated abuses of the asylum system. His Government supported UNHCR in its efforts to develop a crisis management capability, and stressed the importance of the social integration of bona fide refugees into their host countries.

59. Finally, profiting from the advice and assistance of UNHCR, Hungary had acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and had drafted new laws on aliens and Hungarian citizenship. The new legislation contained provisions expressly designed to help stateless persons obtain Hungarian citizenship.

60. Mr. FUTRAKUL (Thailand) said that the 1951 Convention was widely acknowledged as the framework within which refugees should be protected, yet it was inadequate to deal with the magnitude and complexity of contemporary refugee problems. The Convention focused on international protection at the expense of preventing and addressing the root causes of refugee problems. Moreover, in line with the principle of non-refoulement, asylum countries were under an obligation to allow all refugees and displaced persons to enter their territory notwithstanding their limited resources and underdeveloped infrastructure. The existing framework placed the primary burden of refugee problems on asylum countries.

61. His delegation hoped that the Global Consultations on international protection would address the issues of protection and solutions in a more balanced manner. After all, efforts to protect refugees were of limited use in the absence of durable solutions. UNHCR had a central role to play in helping Governments to deal with refugee situations. But UNHCR was often constrained by its mandate. More often than not, the Office was forced to concentrate on protecting refugees in receiving countries instead of tackling problems at the root. Accordingly, drastic changes in UNHCR's role might be called for. The scope of its activities could potentially be broadened and its staff numbers adjusted accordingly. Its core activities needed to be defined flexibly; they should include but not be limited to the protection of refugees. Activities such as reintegration, resettlement and repatriation should no longer be classified as non-core activities. Moreover, UNHCR should be enabled to bridge the gap between humanitarian and development assistance, with donors allocating a modest share of development assistance funding to longer-term development projects.

62. Thailand viewed repatriation as the preferred durable solution to refugee problems, since it reflected the citizen's right to return to his or her country. However, in practical terms repatriation was only an option when conditions in the country of origin allowed. Accordingly, UNHCR needed to promote capacity-building in countries of origin, for example by encouraging income-generating activities and community-based and infrastructure development projects.

63. Mr. Yimer (Ethiopia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

64. Mr. ALI (Bangladesh) said that his delegation welcomed the High Commissioner's emphasis on emergency preparedness, protection and durable solutions, and supported his review of UNHCR's mandate. A definition of core activities should not, however, result in an abrupt withdrawal from all non-core activities. The decision on what constituted core and non-core activities should be dictated by the specific circumstances of a given refugee situation.

65. The developing world had continued to bear the brunt of mass refugee influxes, in stark contrast to the "donor fatigue" of the developed countries. The High Commissioner was right to reject the distinction between humanitarian and development assistance, and Bangladesh supported his call for a contribution amounting to US$ 1 or €1 per citizen as fair and reasonable.

66. Negative stereotyping of refugees and associated xenophobia was an increasingly worrying phenomenon. The dramatization of "mixed flows" of refugees and their "mixed motives" should be vigorously combated, while at the same time efforts should be made to curb genuine abuses of the asylum system. Bangladesh itself had done its utmost to accommodate a refugee population from neighbouring Myanmar, and hoped that UNHCR would maintain its valuable support.

67. To sum up, his Government believed that voluntary repatriation was the preferred durable solution to refugee problems; that poverty and underdevelopment were the underlying causes of conflicts and should therefore be addressed; and that restrictive immigration policies merely forced refugees into the arms of traffickers and smugglers.

68. Mr. WEISS (Austria) said that the use of development funds for refugee-related projects had been discussed within the Global Consultations framework. Historically, Austrian development assistance had not explicitly included refugees, but the link between humanitarian assistance and development had become increasingly apparent. In order to create a favourable environment for socio-economic interaction with local populations, refugees needed to play a part in long-term development strategies. Accordingly, Austria fully supported the High Commissioner's vision of refugees as development actors.

69. Austria had made development funds available to UNHCR for the sustainable local integration of refugees and reintegration of returnees in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Burundi. Notwithstanding the administrative difficulties of linking humanitarian assistance with development projects, his Government intended to pursue such cooperation with UNHCR whenever the Office's operations coincided with Austria's development priorities.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.